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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERB ORTHODOX BISHOP TEODOSIJE EXPRESSES
CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE DELAY IN STATUS PROCESS, THANKS USG
FOR SUPPORT

REF: PRISTINA 853

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: COM met October 12 with Bishop Teodisiye, the moderate Serb religious leader of Decani monastery, who feared that Kosovo Serbs in the enclaves in south were not prepared for final status. Teodisiye asked that the international community do everything possible to encourage and enable them to stay. The Bishop expressed concern over reports that the status process, and the accompanying negotiations over Serb community rights and cultural heritage, might be delayed, with consequent bad results for both his monastery and the broader Serb population in Kosovo.

COM reassured him that the U.S. government remained committed to the negotiation process and that UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari's efforts continued unabated. She also made it clear the USG wants Kosovo Serbs to stay, offering to travel with Teodisiye to Serb areas in Kosovo if he thought it was helpful. Teodisiye recognized U.S. support and was especially grateful for recent USOP intercession on several issues where Albanian authorities had been unresponsive to Church concerns. "We see we are not alone," Teodisiye commented. The soft-spoken Teodisiye is an asset in our effort to encourage Kosovo Serbs to remain after status, and we will work with him closely to reach out to Serbs in the southern enclaves. END SUMMARY.

Enclave Serbs Uncertain, Need Support

12. (C) At an October 12 meeting, Serb Orthodox Bishop Teodisiye expressed concern that Serbs in the enclaves in southern Kosovo were "not prepared" for final status, and urged that the international community do everything possible to protect them and encourage them to stay. He pointed to the bravery of elderly Serb returnees who were injured in a recent grenade attack in their home in Klina, but who vowed to remain in Kosovo nonetheless. As a Kosovo Serb living in a enclave area himself, Teodisiye made clear that he and his monks would remain, but was not sure the Kosovo government understood the vulnerability of Serbs in these areas.

13. (C) Saying "we see we are not alone," Teodisiye thanked

COM for convincing Albanian authorities in Urosevac/Ferizaj to fund the roof repair of a Serbian Orthodox church that was recently vandalized (reftel). He was also grateful for USOP help in stopping Albanian construction in the area of Gazimestan that was encroaching on the nearby Serb monument, and for support of a water project in the vicinity of Urosevac/Ferizaj that would benefit Serb returnees. Teodosije made a special plea that the U.S. and international community help avert attempts by the Decani municipality to develop wooded areas that the Bishop said have long been considered part of his monastery. He noted that there is not much trust in the PISG to resolve these problems and safeguard these areas as the common heritage of all Kosovars.

14. (C) COM reassured Teodosije that the U.S. strongly supports a multi-ethnic Kosovo. If Teodosije thought it would be helpful, COM noted, she would be more than willing to accompany him on visits to Serb enclaves as a demonstration of joint concern for the welfare of local communities. She indicated that the Vienna negotiations had produced good agreement on cultural heritage, including protection zones for sites important to Serbs. The U.S., COM said, would continue to weigh in with Kosovar authorities to protect these sites and ensure Kosovo Serb security. After final status, KFOR would remain and the newly established International Civilian Office (ICO) would be there to implement the agreement and ensure no violations of key provisions.

Questions on Final Status Process

15. (C) Obviously concerned by media reports that the status
PRISTINA 00000862 002 OF 002

process might be delayed by weeks or months, with attendant delays in finalizing the agreements on community rights and cultural heritage, Teodosije asked whether these reports were true. COM affirmed the U.S. commitment to see the status process through to its conclusion and our strong support for Ahtisaari's negotiation effort. Teodosije, relieved, agreed vehemently that resolution of status and the enshrining of minority rights in law could only be of benefit to all the communities in Kosovo. He underscored again the faith placed by the Church and the Serb community in the international community as the only possible guarantors of their long-term survival in Kosovo.

16. (C) COMMENT: The soft-spoken and highly regarded Bishop Teodosije is a voice of reason in a church hierarchy whose other members, at least in Kosovo, have of late unfortunately espoused the most virulent strains of radical nationalism. He made clear that he will remain in Kosovo, and as such can serve as an example to other Kosovo Serbs that they can have a future here in the post-status period. Teodosije represents the moderating effect of his flock's key reality; Serb communities south of the Ibar do not have the option of secession or armed resistance. Teodosije is articulating a reasonable set of conditions under which Serbs can remain in Kosovo, and we will support him in the effort to bring a message of reassurance and concern to the Serb enclaves in the south.

17. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW